

VZCZCXRO2480  
RR RUEHROV  
DE RUEHHI #2511/01 2721015  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 291015Z SEP 06 ZDK  
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3568  
INFO RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH 1901  
RUEHXS/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE  
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 0003

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 002511

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [HUMANR](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: VIETNAM'S PRESIDENT MEETS WITH CATHOLIC LEADERS

REF: HCMC 1047 AND PREVIOUS

SUMMARY AND COMMENT  
-----

¶1. (SBU) On September 28, State President Nguyen Minh Triet met with leaders of Vietnam's Catholic Church for the first time since taking office in June. During the meeting, Triet underlined the GVN's willingness to allow Catholics to become more involved in Vietnam's socio-economic development. Though government contacts privately downplayed the significance of this "courtesy call," the Catholics were very pleased, especially since Triet was willing to frankly discuss issues related to property disputes and GVN permission for Church officials to visit remote parts of the country. We will continue to encourage the GVN to allow the space for Catholics to conduct charitable and humanitarian programs in Vietnam. End Summary and Comment.

¶2. (SBU) On September 29, Vietnamese media widely carried reports of a meeting in Hanoi between President Triet and the Catholic Church's Episcopal Council of Bishops. In addition to the President, Chairman Ngo Yen Thi of the GVN's Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA) participated in the meeting. The Catholics were led by Bishop Nguyen Van Hoa, President of the Council. Hanoi Archbishop Ngo Quang Kiet, Hue Archbishop Pham Nhu The and Ho Chi Minh City Cardinal Pham Minh Man were also members of the Catholic delegation. In its reporting, the media emphasized the GVN's support for Catholic efforts to become more involved in charitable and social development projects while highlighting "national solidarity" on religious matters.

¶3. (SBU) CRA officials informed us that the meeting was merely a courtesy call on the President and "nothing substantive was discussed." According to a close aide to Hanoi Archbishop Ngo Quang Kiet, the meeting was made at the request of members of the Episcopal Council who had wanted to congratulate the new State President in person. The aide stated that after formal greetings, Triet asked the bishops to brief him on the status of outstanding issues and problems for the Church.

¶4. (SBU) Archbishop Man advocated for permission for the Church to become more involved in charitable and humanitarian projects, the aide continued. Archbishop The explained the Church's pending property issues (reftels). Hung Hoa Diocese Bishop Chuong also outlined the difficulties faced by Church leaders trying to minister to Catholics in remote parts of the country, particularly in the northwestern region, including Son La Province. President Triet told the bishops that he was surprised to hear that Catholic clergy still have not been able to visit places within their bishoprics in these regions. Regarding outstanding property issues, Triet also said he would ask relevant agencies to more quickly address these matters. President Triet also promised "to continue encouraging the Church to be more involved in charitable and humanitarian activities/projects," the aide added.

15. (SBU) Kiet's aide noted that, despite the fact that Triet failed to suggest any specific measures that may help to bring immediate solutions to pending problems, the bishops attending the meeting found it encouraging that the State President took such an open and constructive approach to issues facing the Church. The bishops were also glad that Triet did not attempt to use previous GVN excuses like "time is needed to educate local officials," or similar reasons, to justify their unwillingness to help solve the Church's problems. Instead, Triet acknowledged that local officials must "address pending issues facing the Church as soon as possible within their scope of their duties and responsibilities," the aide reported.

Comment

-----

16. (SBU) It remains to be seen whether Triet's highly publicized support for the Catholics' efforts to engage in humanitarian and charitable works aimed at poverty alleviation and healthcare will have a real impact on the ground. It also is notable that no mention was made of allowing the Church to enter the realm of education. As with similar statements in the past, the real question is whether the GVN actually wants to allow the Church to establish more socio-economic development and charitable programs. That the Catholics report that Triet is at least willing to discuss the issues facing the Church in a frank and open manner is an encouraging sign. We will continue to urge the GVN at every opportunity to allow more space for the Church to contribute to society in this way. End Comment.

17. (SBU) Begin verbatim text of Vietnam news report:

State President Nguyen Minh Triet has affirmed the Party and State's

HANOI 00002511 002 OF 002

consistent policy of respecting freedom of religion and belief, as well as creating favorable conditions for religious followers to contribute to national development and implement social and religious affairs.

President Triet made the affirmation while receiving bishops of the Viet Nam Episcopal Council in Ha Noi on September 28.

The State leader stressed that the tradition of great national unity was a source of strength and a driving force in the cause of national construction and defense.

"National unity and solidarity among religions are of important significance that contribute to the success of the renewal process and lead the country forwards on the path of national industrialization and modernization," he said.

The President urged the council to encourage Catholic followers to make practical contributions to the cause of national development and help foreign friends better understand Viet Nam's renewal achievements as well as its policy on freedom of religion and belief.

Bishop Nguyen Van Hoa, President of the Viet Nam Episcopal Council, expressed his thanks to the Party and State for their care for Catholics and joy at the country's achievements in socio-economic development, hunger eradication and poverty reduction over the past years.

The bishops pledged to support and make more contributions to social affairs, hunger eradication and poverty reduction and national cultural identity preservation.

End text of report.

ALOISI